

**Testimony Before The
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

H.B. No. 6830 AAC The Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2013

March 4, 2011

The Client's Perspective

LaKeasha spent several years in the foster care system as a child in Connecticut. She grew up in a housing project in a bad neighborhood and felt she never had a strong female role model. "I can't remember my mother ever being sober," she says. She went to jail for the first time at age 14 for minor drug possession. By age 24, she was incarcerated for a third time. Thinking back on this time, she says, "I felt lost – mentally, emotionally, and everything."

While she was in jail, she was thankful that her two children were able to stay with family. Upon her release, she was determined to get her children back as soon as possible. She did not want them to have the same bad experiences that she had had in the foster care system. However, she did not have a stable place to live with her children. Her old apartment was in an unsafe neighborhood in Bridgeport; it was so badly maintained that she calls it "a rat hole." LaKeasha was also concerned about falling back into her old lifestyle because she had returned to the same environment that she was in before her incarceration. LaKeasha knew that she needed help to find housing and to reunite with her children.

LaKeasha's caseworker at the Department of Children and Families (DCF) referred her to The Connection, Inc's Supportive Housing for Families. LaKeasha was initially hesitant about the services and help offered to her by her Connections

caseworker. No one had ever helped her before and she found it difficult to trust others. Over time, LaKeasha developed a close relationship with her caseworker: "I talked to her and she listened, and she always gave me positive feedback no matter what."

The caseworker also helped LaKeasha find resources and develop important skills. LaKeasha was very motivated and hard-working – she worked two jobs, as a nurse's assistant and a waitress – but she had trouble budgeting her money. Her caseworker helped her improve her financial skills, move into better housing, and obtain furniture for her new place. LaKeasha reunited with her two children in March 2007 – less than two months after her referral to The Connection, Supportive Housing for Families.

LaKeasha obtained a Family Unification Program (FUP) voucher through The Connection, allowing her to pay just 30% of her income toward rent. She has retained the voucher even as she moved to new apartments. Her current neighborhood, in which she has lived for about two years, is "a lot better" than her old one – much quieter and safer. LaKeasha says she is happy that she has a yard outside so her kids can go outside and without her having to worry.

LaKeasha is planning to use what she's learned in her life to help others. Right now, she is taking online courses to earn a college degree. She wants to serve as a role model and an advocate for kids like herself, who have been involved in the child welfare system, and help them avoid making the mistakes that she made. LaKeasha encourages others to be open-minded about participating programs like The Connections, Inc's Supportive Housing for Families - Family Unification and Preservation Program because she knows they are there to help families in need.